

BWCA/Quetico Trip – Spring 2008

Birch Lake and Basswood

May 31st – June 7th 2008

Day 1: Saturday, May 31st, 2008 The Drive Up

The Crew:

GeoFisher, MadNat, and Dave M.

Out of all my trips, this was one of the toughest to plan, coordinate, organize and pull off. Not because of the number of people, or the distance to be traveled, or logistics...or any of the normal reasons. This trip was tough to plan due to the odd number, and the fact that both of my travel partners were rookies.

Dave M, is one of my best friends, and has heard about this trip many, many times before. I've always wanted to get him up there on a trip, but was never really sure how to go about doing it. And MadNat is my youngest daughter. She has been on fishing trips before, and had participated in a family vacation to Kawishiwi Lodge a couple years before, and finally, had done an easy trip into the Boundary Waters last year, but that is quite frankly, not the same.

In addition to Dave M being a rookie, he was recently diagnosed as diabetic, which led to some other issues with regards to safety and meal planning.

As usual, the drive up was pretty uneventful. Dave M. and I handled all the driving, while Natalie pretty much slept the entire way.....

Since this was Dave's first time up there, we drove through the night, had breakfast at Perkins in Duluth, and enjoyed the scenery along the North Shore up to highway 1 and then crossed over to Ely. Once in Ely, we had lunch at what used to be Cranberries.....

There was a group of Boy Scouts (about 20) eating lunch there. Through some simple question and answer sessions with the scouts, and their leaders, we found out the fishing had been horrible. They had caught only a few dozen fish. Not even enough to have one fish meal between the 3 or 4 groups that made up this large group of scouts.

This was a little concerning to me, but GadgetMan, Proffit, and BassMan had been in the park the previous week, and had very good luck.....We will see.

Day 2: Sunday, June 1st, 2008 Birch Lake

As I stated earlier, there were some trip dynamics that needed to be "adjusted" for this trip. First.....I had two rookies, second, I was the only experienced woodsman out of the three of us, and third, Dave M. had recently been diagnosed with sugar diabetes.

With all those issues in mind, I thought an easy base camping type trip was in order. I poured over my maps, and decided on a dual trip. Our trip would include both parks.....the Boundary Waters and Quetico. I chose both parks because I originally wanted only Quetico, but did not get my permits in time. Instead of only going into the park for 4 days, I added 3 days to the front of our trip, thereby extending it by 3 or 4 additional days in canoe country.

I've been to Birch Lake and that particular area before, and I knew the fishing could be pretty good. I've caught monster northern pike, largemouth bass, walleye, perch, and of course the bronzeback in Birch, Carp, Emerald, Fisher, and Basswood. I knew we would have opportunities on every one of those species. The only fish I had not caught in this area, but would try on this trip were lakers.

A quick breakfast at our outfitter, Canadian Border Outfitters, and we were off. We always take the quick start tow, and this trip was no different. It would save us an entire day of paddling, allowing us to get to Birch early in the afternoon, get camp setup and do some fishing on the first day.

For our canoe, we decided to rent a Wenonah Champlain. The Portage yoke was one of those snap in seats that double as a portage yoke. It worked pretty dang good. Again, as always, I packed too much. We had 3 propacks and 3 daypacks in the canoe. Along with the packs, we also had 2 Granite Gear camp chairs, 2 tackle boxes and 6 fishing poles. As with all my trips, this is primarily a FISHING trip, and lots of fishing gear and fishing poles are required.

We left the outfitters by 8:00am, and had checked through Prairie Portage by noon.

As soon as we checked into Prairie Portage, we had our first "incident". There would only be 3, and that is good for a trip with me. There was no need to portage over into Basswood, since we were going to Birch Lake. That being the case, we left all of OUR gear there, went over to the ranger station, and purchased 3 daytrip passes. We did not need permits, because the first 3 days were going to be BWCA camping nights, but we wanted to daytrip into Quetico, so daytrip passes were needed.

We received our permits, went back to the canoe, loaded and balanced our stuff, and then proceeded to paddle the chute to Birch. Dave M. was in the front, MadNat was in the middle and I was in the back. I had been in a canoe with Dave M. before, and MadNat, but NOT in a loaded canoe. As soon as we left the landing, Dave M. saw something.....a metal rod, which looked like it was going to poke the canoe. He reached over to move it, and we nearly went in the dring. In any other canoe, we would have been in the water, but the Champlain is a beast, and as soon as I yelled to not lean, Dave came back to center, and we were good.

No biggie, but dang, it really scared me. I thought to myself "what have I gotten into?" Would I be able to handle this, and more importantly, could I keep Dave M, MadNat and myself safe for 8 days in Canoe Country? Had I bitten off more than I could handle? These questions would all be answered over the next 8 days.

I explained to Dave M. and MadNat about loaded canoes, and sudden movements, and leaning. I should have done this before we left the landing.....OOPS. I really think MadNat and Dave M. had no idea just how "tipsy" a loaded canoe could get. Once we ironed this out, we paddled the chute and basically had an uneventful paddle to Birch Lake, where we chose a campsite pretty much centered in the lake.

We quickly setup camp, set the steaks out to thaw, and decided to go fishing.

Fishing turned out to be pretty good.....In our first day of fishing, we caught a few smallies, and some really big largemouth bass that were on the nest. Water temps were already above 60, which meant the smallies were done here, and we'd be targeting largemouth bass. While fishing the far end of the lake, near the Carp Lake portage, we had incident number two.

The weather was dang near perfect. Not too breezy, not cold at all, and no sign of rain. We all took our raingear, but did not put it on. The skies were clear, and nothing was supposed to be blowing in. Well, we all know canoe country weather can get ugly really fast. We were back in a long narrow finger, with a fast approaching storm to our back. I really had no idea of the storm

that was brewing. We were busy fishing. I felt some wind picking up, and it was a cooler wind, which is a sure sign of a storm brewing. I looked up, took a look behind us, and saw some really ugly clouds. I figured we had 30 minutes to get back to camp. Plenty of time, I thought.

Well, it was not. In a really stupid executive decision, I chose for the three of us not to put on our rain gear. As we all know, that was a bad choice. About 1/2 way back to our campsite, and in the middle of the lake, the wind started blowing really hard. The wind quickly blew us sideways, and we were being pushed along with the waves. Again Dave M. leaned to try to compensate for the canoe being pushed sideways. I yelled, he straightened up, and the canoe rode on top of the waves like it is supposed to. MadNat was scared stiff, holding onto the gunnels. I managed to keep calm enough to quickly get us quartered into the wind and waves. I was finally in control of the canoe.....And that could have been ugly.

By this time, it was blowing about 20mph and raining very hard.

When we were 20-30 ft from shore, I straightened the canoe, and we were now paddling directly into the teeth of the wind.....At least I was now fairly calm, and Dave M. and MadNat were also doing better.

A few minutes later, as we neared our campsite, the weather broke as quickly as it blew in. I warned both Dave M. and MadNat that the landing, which was solid granite, would be very slippery, and told them both to let me exit the canoe first. We all managed to get out without going in the water but we were all soaked from my foolish decision. I would make poor decisions all week, but this was by far one of the worse.

Once at camp, I had MadNat change her clothes, because she was cold, but I chose to just let mine dry. It was done raining, and the wind was blowing enough to dry me out quickly. I didn't think it was over and it was getting close to dinner time. With that in mind, Dave M. and I looked around for some wood to build a fire to get the steaks and potatoes going.

Before the steaks were done, it started to rain again.....fortunately, we built a pretty decent fire, and the coal bed was hot enough to cook the steak and potatoes, and even bake and caramelize the sweet onion I brought along just for that purpose.

After a soggy dinner.....which we ate under the tarp, the rain let up enough to allow us to go fishing again. I was totally drained, so we opted to stay close to camp. We all went out and managed to catch 5 or 6 decent sized largemouth.

At dark, we headed back to camp, built another fire, and had cocoa and coffee. After coffee, we went to bed. Man, I was GLAD to be back in Canoe Country.

Fish Tally for the Day: 13 total...A mixed bag of smallmouth and largemouth bass.

Day 3: Monday, June 2nd, 2008 Carp Lake

After a pretty crappy start, the previous day, nothing could possibly go wrong today. I was really beat from the day before. There was lots of paddling, a couple really bad scares, cooking in the rain, and pretty much a lot of camp work.

Before I go any further, I knew this trip would be a lot different than my other trips. I wanted this trip to be a great fishing adventure for my good friend Dave M. and I wanted MadNat to go on trips in the future. For that to happen, I knew I would be doing a lot of paddling, all the cooking and handling the saw and axe. While I didn't make any official rules with regards to the axe and saw, I really didn't want either MadNat or Dave M. using either. MadNat and Dave M. took care of all the camp dishes, and most of the water pumping, which significantly helped around camp.

Over the last few years, I've been trying to add better and better meals for my trips. This trip would be no different. I had done some meals the trip before that worked out great, and I modified these to help Dave M. with his diabetic diet. All trip we ate like kings.

Breakfasts for this trip were rotated between instant oatmeal, pancakes, and nutrigain bars. For breakfast this morning, we chose a quick breakfast of instant oatmeal.

We had planned on fishing Polaris Lake, but after walking the portage and looking at the Polaris side landing, we decided to take the 40 rod portage to Carp and try for smallies, largemouth, and maybe some lakers.

When we arrived at the Carp Lake portage, the water was running into Birch, so we decided to try the running water for walleye and smallies. We fished the area for 20 or 30 minutes without a bite. That was uncommon. Usually, everywhere water runs into a lake, you can generally catch smallies, and the occasional walleye. On this trip, that would not be the case. Since we didn't catch any fish below the falls, we headed over the portage, and fished the US side of Carp.

I was not disappointed. We managed to catch 10 or 15 smallies in that particular area, and they were all pretty decent fish. Not only that, but the sun was bright and high, so these fish were basically bonus fish.

Some weather was blowing in, not like the night before, but it looked like it was going to cloud over, which it did. With the weather coming in, we put on our rain pants and jackets. We also decided to hit an area near mid lake on Carp which had produced some decent smallie and walleye action a couple years prior. We paddled for about 30 minutes to reach the area.

Once there, we were able to blow down the bank with ease, and throw "magic-baits", tubes, and jigs to the structure. On every tree we targeted, we caught a fish. In some cases we caught both the male and female. After fishing for an hour or so, we decided to head back and get some dinner. It was around 3:00pm, and it would take us a couple hours to get back to camp.

Once we arrived at camp, I died.....I was really tired. I went to the tent and rested for about an hour, and then got up and started preparing dinner.

Dinner was Red beans and Rice. Along with this dinner, I added 2 packages of individual wrapped spam and 2 packages of shelf stable chicken. This makes a great dinner. I also chose to make one of our 3 desserts; a peanut butter and chocolate jiffy no bake type dessert. Dave M. was simply amazed that you could do this type of stuff in the Boundary Waters.

Like the night before, we built a fire, had some coffee, and discussed the day's events. Our fire was cut short by rain, so we headed to bed a little earlier than normal....No matter, I was beat.

Fish Tally for the Day: 30 total...A mixed bag of smallmouth and largemouth bass, and again no northern pike or walleye yet.

Day 4: Tuesday, June 3rd, 2008 Basswood Lake

Since I had waited a little too long to get my permits together, I failed to secure the right permits for Basswood Lake. That is why we had to split our trip between the Boundary Waters, and Quetico. All in all, this worked out fine. It allowed us to stay on Birch Lake with a fire grate, and a ranger pot, which MadNat appreciated.

Moving day had arrived. Since we were planning on breaking camp and moving to Basswood, we had no reason to get up early, or get moving quickly. With that in mind, we decided to have pancakes and bacon for breakfast. Man.....they are GOOD.

I started bringing pancakes a couple years ago. First, it started out with me bringing 1 pancake meal. After a couple years, that 1 meal morphed into 3 or 4 meals. What the heck, I already bring in enough JUNK to feed an army, I might as well bring some more pancake mix. It really doesn't weight that much, and that way you can use all the syrup you bring.

We would have pancakes on this trip for 4 or 5 mornings.

We broke camp, headed to Prairie Portage, checked in with the rangers, and headed to Inlet Bay. With all the pre conditions I set for myself, we chose to take the closest campsite we could find. I wanted it very close to the ranger station. Our campsite was the site on the opposite side of the island in Inlet Bay. This site would give us access to many different areas, and met my requirements for a quick exit if necessary.

We reached our Inlet Bay campsite a little after 1:00pm. We setup our site quickly, but thoroughly, since we would be using this site for the next 4 days. We found a better area for the tarp and used rocks to throw a center pull rope over a high branch. This was the first time I actually hung a tarp using a center rope to give more form to the tarp.

A quick lunch of peanut butter and Jelly wraps, some gorp and a couple slim jims, and we were off to the fishing grounds. I knew of a couple areas around inlet bay, so we headed to one of the "honey" holes I'd been told about. We immediately started catching fish. Fish after fish, and these were all decent smallmouth bass. We caught multiple fish over 3lbs, a few over 4lbs and some pushing 5. My scale died the day before, so I cannot call any of these fish 5 pounders. I can guarantee you this.....some were bigger than many 4 pounders I've caught up there in the past.

We fished for around 6 hours and caught 45 smallies. This was a significant number of fish for half a day of fishing in Quetico. I've done just as good at other times, but not with 2 rookies. This was a good number. As the trip progressed, we caught more fish than the day before. This would hold true, except for the last two days of our trip.

Dinner was a planned fish meal night, so we tried to catch some walleye. We fished until 7:00pm, but did not catch any walleye. Without walleyes, we decided to harvest a couple eater sized smallmouth bass. I harvested 1, Dave M. harvested 1, and since MadNat was on her own license, she also harvested 1. 3 smallies would be plenty for dinner.

Along with smallmouth bass, I made some stovetop stuffing, and 4 cheese instant mashed potatoes. Also, I decided this would be a good dessert night. Yes, you can make cherry cheesecake in Canoe Country.

After dinner, it started to rain again, so we headed to bed a little earlier than normal.

Tomorrow, we would try to get up early, and TRY to get the morning bite.

Fish Tally for the Day: 45 total...A mixed bag of smallmouth and largemouth bass, and again no northern pike or walleye yet.

Day 5: Wednesday, June 4th, 2008 Poacher Lake

I had talked to Dave M. and MadNat about trying to catch some lakers. With that in mind, we had decided to try to find the Poacher portage, and to hit Poacher Lake for some eater size lakers. I had been told by numerous friends on the Canoe Country bulletin board that Poacher Lake had lakers, and the portage, while LONG was not very tough, or weedy, or swampy. This was my kind of portage.

Well.....we got up a little later than expected, and instead of the planned oatmeal, we decided to hammer out some pancakes again. Pancakes in Canoe Country are much better than oatmeal. Making pancakes for 3 really doesn't take too long. I think we spent about 45 minutes each morning for pancakes versus 10 minutes for oatmeal. This is a good trade-off, if you ask me.

After breakfast, and cleanup, we vetoed the Poacher Portage idea. Instead, we headed out to some of the fishing spots we had not yet tried. It was beginning to rain, so we decided to put on our rain gear pants. Jackets can be put on pretty easily while in the canoe. Today was going to be a great fishing day. I really hoped the overcast skies would stay all day.

Since we were going to be fishing the same areas over and over, we decided to leave certain areas to "rest" while we pounded other areas. There is a ton of fishable water in Inlet Bay and surrounding water, and we were able to successfully fish multiple areas more than one time. In fact, some areas produced quality fish on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. This is not an uncommon thing in Quetico. In one area on the Eastern Side of the park, GadgetMan and I fished one bay 3 times in the same day, catching over 114 fish.....So, I know these areas will reload, and they will reload often.

We hit the water by 9:00am, and fished hard until lunchtime. We had planned to be fishing close to camp on multiple days, and since this was the case, we decided to go back to camp and have BWCA pizzas. I've done these before in Canoe country, and they are great.

Basically, all you need are some tortilla wraps, Boboli pizza sauce, Italian seasoning, pepperoni, and string cheese. To make the pizzas, food prep is critical. Prepare the string cheese by separating it into easier to manage strings, open the pepperoni, open the pizza sauce, and get out the oil. The best way to make the pizzas is by having more than 1 person cooking. Throw the wrap in some hot oil. Once it is hot on the oiled side, flip it over. At this point, have your "co-cook" add the cheese, pizza sauce, pepperoni, and blast it with lots of Italian seasoning. After all the ingredients are in the pizza, fold the wrap in half, and continue cooking, making SURE not to burn it. That is all there is to it. AND man they are good. I would plan on making 2 or 3 for each member of your party.

After lunch, we took a quick nap. Again, I was beat from all the boat control and paddling. As stated earlier, I wanted to make this trip enjoyable for MadNat and Dave M. With that in mind, I tried to handle all the canoe control while we were fishing. That allowed MadNat and Dave M. to concentrate on fishing, and not paddling. When we were planning on covering more than 1 cove of distance, they would both pick up their paddles and help, but for the majority of the time, I was a trolling motor. This does not mean that I didn't get in plenty of fishing time, because I did.

I slept for a couple hours, and then we headed back out to do some more fishing.

Once we hit the water again, it started raining. We had expected this, as it had been drizzling and spitting rain all day. No matter, we were all prepared. While I didn't think it was too cold, MadNat was getting cold and chose to wear my gloves.....They are Neoprene, and worked great. Did I mention that she was a trooper all week.

We fished through the sprinkling rain, a couple serious rain showers, and then some misty rain. It didn't rain all day, but was pretty wet. We did manage to catch our share of fish that day, and we finally started to catch some northern pike. In fact, Dave M. caught a dandy northern that weighed close to 10 pounds. We continued fishing until 8:00pm or so, and then headed back to our campsite for dinner.

At our campsite, it was still raining, so I moved the stove under the tarp, and cooked there. We were all cold, and it was a pretty nasty day all around, so we decided that a hearty, warm meal was in order. With that in mind, I made Chicken Helper Cheesy Enchiladas. These are great and easy to prepare. Chicken Helper and 2 packages of shelf stable chicken make a perfect meal in

Canoe Country. I also brought along a small bottle of Chipotle Tabasco Sauce. Not too hot, but still tangy and spicy enough to add some zing. MadNat opted not to use the sauce. Make the Enchiladas based on the cooking directions, and then use tortilla wraps as the Enchilada shell. I also take Tostitos nacho cheese sauce in a plastic tub. Put some of this cheese in the wrap to give it some more zing.

Since it was still raining and kind of nasty outside, we headed to our tents after dinner. Again, we were going to try to get up early the next day to go fishing.

All in all this was a GREAT day.....GREAT FISHING, GREAT FRIENDS, GREAT DAUGHTER.....GREAT FOOD.....

Yes, I'm blessed.

Fish Tally for the Day: 56 total...A mixed bag of smallmouth and largemouth bass, and no walleye.....but we did start catching some northern pike.

Day 6: Thursday, June 5th, 2008 Fishing Inlet Bay

Finally, we made it out EARLY. We had all decided to get up early, eat oatmeal, and hit the water before 7:00am. We were successful.

After a quick breakfast of oatmeal and coffee, we headed to some parts of the area that we had not fished yet. We had deliberately saved these for our early day, and this was it. I started fishing tubes, and jigs while MadNat and Dave M. fished "magic baits." We fished until 10:00am and then headed back to camp because quite frankly.....we were tired. In the 3 hours before lunch, we had caught 30 or so smallies.

We went back to camp for lunch again. It worked out so good the day before; we decided to do it again. Besides, it is a good break from sitting in the canoe all day. For lunch, I had decided to make BWCA Fajitas. These also are pretty easy to make. Basically you need tortilla wraps, 2 packages of stable chicken, Fajita seasoning, and Tostitos cheese sauce in a plastic tub. Cook the chicken and Fajita seasoning mix, then make the fajitas the same way you make the pizzas, using the cheese sauce instead of string cheese. Again, these are great. Plan on having 2 or 3 of these for each person in your party, and be sure to bring extra fuel if you're doing these. You will need about 3-4 minutes of fuel for each fajita or pizza you make.

After lunch, we headed back out, hitting the water around 2:00pm. Again, since this was a going to be a fantastic fishing day, we decided to stay out till dark. This was also a fish night, so catching some walleye was high on our list.

A couple of hours into our afternoon fishing, MadNat became bored, and decided to read instead of fish. Had she continued fishing, I'm sure we would have broken the 100 fish barrier. She read for a couple hours, and then decided she wanted to do some more fishing. She was really interested in catching some walleyes, and since Dave and I were not being too successful, SHE was going to catch dinner.

After discussing the fact that walleye liked a really slow presentation, deeper water, and the bait had to be on or close to the bottom, MadNat asked me to tie on a better walleye bait. I've always had great luck on smoke grubs, but she wanted to fish a tube jig, so I put on a 5/16 oz smoke red pepper tender tube, and told her to cast as far as she could on the other side of the canoe. Dave M. and I were hammering the bank, catching prespawn and spawning smallies. Not exactly the best place to catch walleyes. Once MadNat cast her lure to the other side, I told her to open her bail and let the bait fall to the bottom. After it hit the bottom, I told her to barely move it.....making sure it was in contact with the bottom at all times.

In only a few short minutes, MadNat caught a decent sized walleye. After she caught her walleye, I tied on the exact same bait, fished it the same way and managed to put a couple more in the canoe. This would indeed make a GREAT fish dinner.

It was still early.....only 6:00pm, we had caught enough fish for dinner, but Dave and I wanted to continue the good fishing streak. Since MadNat had not fished for a couple hours, our numbers were not up to par. We had not even caught as many as we had the day before. I asked MadNat if we could fish for 1 more hour. She agreed, so Dave M, MadNat and I continued fishing.

There was only 1 spot in the area we had not fished yet, and I wanted to try the evening bite in that area. It took us about 20 minutes to paddle there. Once there, the wind had been blowing in the area all day, and the baitfish and smallies were corralled in a very small bay. We could see the smallies smashing baitfish. I told MadNat and Dave M. this was going to be a magical evening, and it was. In less than 1 hour, Dave M, and I managed to catch nearly 30 smallmouths. These smallies were the biggest MEANEST smallies we had caught all week. Dave M. was fishing the "magic bait", while I chose to fish a tube. Either bait was equally deadly for catching these aggressive prespawn smallies. Not only were they hammering it, they were also spitting up tons of ciscoes and crayfish. These smallies were crushing anything that came within their area. I suspect these fish were just coming up and were marking their areas to do their business. After 30 minutes of nonstop fishing MadNat joined the fun.

Finally, Dave M. and MadNat knew what I was talking about, when I said these fish travel in pods, and when you find the right feeding pod, you can simply CRUSH them.

This was the best day of the trip, and one of the best days I've had up there.

We could have easily stayed in that cove for another hour, and probably would have caught 50 more but I promised MadNat that we would leave after 1 hour, and we did.

Back at camp, it was getting dark. I quickly cleaned the walleye, while Dave M. and MadNat built a fire. The weather was changing, and as I suspected this would be the last GOOD day of fishing for the trip.

We had walleye, stove top stuffing, and garlic and herb instant potatoes. After dinner, we sat around the fire, and reminisced about the GREAT fishing we had that day. It was, as I said before, one of the best fishing days I've had in Canoe Country. Best of all, I was able to share it with my daughter, and one of my best friends, Dave.

We were all bushed, and this was indeed a great.....no a FANTASTIC day, but as I stated earlier, the weather was changing. Around midnight, a pretty big thunderstorm blew into our area. This storm was huge, dropping about 4-5 inches of rain overnight and into the early morning.

Fish Tally for the Day: 76 total...A mixed bag of smallmouth and largemouth bass, a few walleye, and some northern pike

Day 7: Friday, June 6th, 2008 Wind bound

The wind blew all night the night before, and it rained a ton. This was our last full day in the park and we really wanted to get out and do some fishing. This is where I made my final BAD mistake of the trip. While no one got hurt, it could have been really bad, and I'm a fool for taking the risk.

We had a decent breakfast.....another pancake breakfast.....Imagine that. After breakfast, the wind seemed to be dying down, and it looked like we would be able to do some fishing. There

was one final area I really wanted to fish. Just before Bailey Bay, there is a “chute” and a bay that looks very similar to the “magic” spot that we had fished last night. It was still overcast, and the weather looked better than it really was, so we decided to head out and try to fish that particular area.

We paddled from our campsite, past the opening into Inlet Bay, through the chute, and arrived at our destination. Immediately I knew it was a bad idea. Not only was the wind not dying down as I had thought, but it was actually gaining strength. The area was getting hammered with wind and waves that were developing over the entire length of Basswood Lake. Had this been day one, we surely would have been in the water. It was not day one, and Dave and MadNat both recognized we were in trouble. The wind and waves were so bad; there was no way for me to turn the canoe, without taking on water or worse, taking a 3 ft roller broadside.

I recognized the problem, and quickly back paddled with all my might to get us back into an area where the wind and rollers were not so bad. Without saying a word, Dave and MadNat knew we had to head back to camp.

We got the canoe turned around, and headed back to camp but the wind was really serious and the waves were even worse.

In the “chute” the wind didn’t seem to be so bad, and I actually assumed that we’d be fine. That was a bad assumption. At the end of the “chute” the wind really started to pick up. It was so bad, that it actually slammed us against the point that we were trying to paddle around. We were jammed up against the bank on some gravel and rocks. We stayed there for about 30 minutes, with our campsite in sight. The wind was building even greater by now. It was not going to lie down, and we did not have the gear for an extended stay at a cold site.

We stored all of our loose gear, including fishing rods, and tackle, putting everything that was loose in my Seal Line Daypack or MadNat’s daypack. I had Dave and MadNat hand their fishing poles back to me, and I stowed them in the back of the canoe. I then told them that if the wind turned us sideways, we’d be done.....and once we start heading to our island campsite, we MUST continue. There would be no turning back, and that everyone was going to have to paddle as HARD as possible.

After the pep talk, with the wind still gaining strength, we headed out. The “crossing” from the chute to our campsite on Inlet Bay was only half a mile or so wide, but what scared me was that there were no campers around, NO boats coming up to the falls to fish, and worse yet, the rangers at Prairie Portage could not see us behind the island. If we went in the water, we’d be in serious trouble. The wind was really blowing now, and the waves were pretty serious, with 2-3 ft rollers, and whitecaps. We took it easy, one wave at a time, making sure to ride the waves and not get broadside to any of them. After what seemed like an hour, we finally made it to our campsite.

At our site, I was really mad at myself for allowing the group to get into that situation. Neither Dave nor MadNat were strong enough paddlers to take on that challenge.

The waves and wind continued throughout the day, and into the night, never dying down. The next morning, we would have to pack up and leave. Our tow was scheduled for 10:00am, but we all decided to get up as early as possible and head back for our tow.

This was one of the worse wind bound days I have ever had. Not only that, it was also one of the only fishless days I’ve had in the park.

Day 8: Saturday, June 7th, 2008 Going Home

It stormed all night, and I could tell the wind had not stopped blowing. At 7:00am I rolled out of my sleeping bag. I woke MadNat, and we both started cleaning up the tent, and preparing to break camp.

Once done with the tent, I went and made some coffee. It was about 20 degrees cooler than it had been the day before, so we were all bundled up a little more than most of the week. The wind was still blowing, but there were no whitecaps, and it was blowing towards the ranger station, which was good.

We had a quick breakfast of oatmeal and nutrigain bars, loaded up the canoe, and headed across Inlet Bay towards Prairie Portage. The scare from the day earlier made us much more aware of the wind and rain, but it was not very windy now, and it had stopped raining. Actually, the morning was turning out to be pretty good.

Once we made it to Prairie Portage, we realized we were about 3 hours early for our tow. We decided to portage the majority of our gear over to the Birch Lake side, and then go back and try our luck fishing for a final few hours.

I had some anchor bags made from a basketball net, so we filled them with rocks, tied them to the back of the canoe and headed out. I put the nose of the canoe close, but not IN the rapids, and we fished the area with jigs and tubes. While the fishing was not stellar, in about 1 hour, we caught a mixed bag of smallies and largemouth.

Fish Tally for the Day: 11 total...A mixed bag of smallmouth and largemouth bass.

Final Thoughts:

What can I say.....Anytime you can take good friends and your kids, and introduce them to Canoe Country, you're doing something right.

Again, this was one of my favorite trips. I really like the easier trips, and I especially like this trip because my daughter was able to experience some great fishing. She also got to experience what canoe country weather can really be like. I've told her before about monster weather changes, and ugly storms, but on her two previous trips, the weather was great. On this trip, Dave, and MadNat experienced just how quickly a storm could blow in, and just as quickly how the weather could clear.

I'm especially glad that Dave M. enjoyed the trip.....and I'm sure he had a pretty good time fishing.

I'm already planning trips for me and MadNat in the future, and I hope to get Dave M. up there again.

As usual, I cannot wait until Next YEAR.....oh wait; I'm going to Kawnipi in the fall.